

Mr. F. Buckland exhibited several specimens of the Smooth Snake (*Coronella austriaca*), and gave particulars of the various instances of its occurrence in several parts of England.

The Secretary called the attention of the Meeting to the living Aye-aye (*Chiromys madagascariensis*) which had been added to the Society's Menagerie in the preceding August. This valuable animal had been liberally presented to the Society by Edward Mellish, Esq., of the Mauritius (one of the members of the mission sent to Madagascar on the accession of Radama II. in 1861), and had reached England in safety by the overland mail on the 12th August.

The following papers were read:—

1. OBSERVATIONS ON THE LIVING AYE-AYE IN THE ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS. BY A. D. BARTLETT.

The subject of the following remarks is a fine adult female of the Aye-aye (*Chiromys madagascariensis*), which arrived in this country on the 12th of August last. On the voyage, this animal produced a young one, which lived about ten days. On arriving here she was in poor condition and very feeble; she soon, however, began to feed freely, and has now considerable strength, as is shown by the timber destroyed in the cage in which she is kept.

This animal is much blacker, and appears larger, than the male of this species now in the British Museum; the long hairs on the back of the neck, extending to the lower part of the body, have white points; these white points are thickest above, and become less numerous towards the limbs and tail, which appear quite black; the hairs of the tail, however, are white or grey at the roots (this can only be observed by separating them); the chin and throat are dirty white, which colour extends over the chest; the short hairs on the face are a mixture of dirty grey and white; the long hairs are black; the eyes light brown, surrounded by dark-coloured hairs; the nose and muzzle are of a dirty flesh-colour; the lips pink; the ears, shining black, and naked, but thickly studded with small protuberances; the feet and toes are sooty black, with the under surface and claws lighter, inclining to flesh-colour. The situation of the mammæ is remarkable: they are two in number, and placed at the lowest part of the abdomen (the animal differing in this respect entirely from the Lemurs and Bats, the teats of which are on the breast).

The Aye-aye sleeps during the day; and the body is then generally curved round and lying on its side, the tail is spread out and flattened over it, so that the head and body of the animal are almost entirely covered by the tail.

It is only at night that the Aye-aye exhibits any activity. I hear her crawling about and gnawing the timber when, to me, all is perfectly dark; and I have been surprised to find that upon the introduction of a light, directed to the face of the animal, she does not exhibit any signs of uneasiness, but stretches out her arm and tries to touch the lamp with her long fingers. She frequently hangs by

her hind legs, and in this position cleans and combs out her large tail, using the slender hook-like third finger with great rapidity, reminding one strongly of the movements of the large Bats (*Pteropus*). This skeleton-like finger is used with great address in cleaning her face and picking the corners of the eyes, nose, mouth, ears, and other parts of her body; during these operations the other fingers are frequently partially closed.

In feeding, the left hand only is used, although she has the full use of her right one. The mode of taking her food requires careful attention, in consequence of the very rapid movement of the hand during the process. The fourth finger (which is the longest and largest) is thrust forward into the food, the slender third finger is raised upwards and backwards above the rest, while the first finger or thumb is lowered so as to be seen below and behind the chin; in this position the hand is drawn backwards and forwards rapidly, the inner side of the fourth finger passing between the lips, the head of the animal being held sideways, thus depositing the food in the mouth at each movement; the tongue, jaws, and lips are kept in full motion all the time. Sometimes the animal will advance towards and lap from the dish like a cat, but this is unusual. I have never heard her utter any cry, or produce any vocal sound, during the many hours at night in which I have watched her habits, nor has she appeared shy or angry at my presence.

With reference to food, this creature exhibits no inclination to take any kind of insects, but feeds freely on a mixture of *milk, honey, eggs*, and any *thick, sweet, glutinous fluid*, rejecting meal-worms, grasshoppers, the larvæ of wasps, and all similar objects. Consequently I am inclined to think that this animal is not insectivorous. Its large and powerful teeth lead me to infer that it may possibly wound trees, and cause them to discharge their juices into the cavity made by its teeth; and that upon this fluid it probably feeds. This appears to me the more likely, as I observe that our specimen returns frequently to the same spot on the tree which she had previously injured. I am also strengthened in my opinion by noticing the little attention paid by the animal to its food. It does not watch or look after it; for I have on several occasions removed the vessel containing its food during the time the animal was feeding, and the creature continued to thrust its hand forward, as before, upon the same spot—though after a while, finding no more food, she discontinued, and moved off to search for more elsewhere. This apparently stupid act is so unlike the habits of an animal intended to capture or feed on living creatures that I am inclined to believe that the Aye-aye feeds upon inanimate substances. I have frequently seen it eat a portion of the bark and wood after taking a quantity of the fluid food.

The excrement of this animal much resembles the dung of small rabbits, being in separate nearly round balls.